

Issue 1

Oct. 2022

M u s i n g P u b l i c a t i o n s

The Nuances



of New-Age Feminism

Contents

03	<i>Word from the Editor</i>
04	<i>Flow Portrait No.11</i>
05	<i>To Secure History</i>
06	<i>The Novel</i>
07	<i>Look how I move</i>
08	<i>M.I.S.A.N.D.R.Y</i>
09	<i>Fifty Shades of Blue</i>
11	<i>Poison</i>
12	<i>The Menace of Feminism</i>
13	<i>Look how I move</i>
14	<i>Choices</i>
15	<i>On the Bench</i>
17	<i>Is the Patriarchy Sucking the Life out of You?</i>
19	<i>Tarot Cards</i>
20	<i>Nostalgia</i>
21	<i>Justice Runs Away</i>
22	<i>Nude in Gray</i>
23	<i>Period Sonnet</i>
24	<i>Flow Portrait No. 8</i>
25	<i>Are You Young at Heart?</i>
26	<i>Molting</i>
27	<i>Sleeping Beauty and the Seven Pricks</i>
29	<i>I Will Make Waves</i>
30	<i>Ignorant Advice for Not Drowning</i>
31	<i>Sketches from a Two-Decade Battle with Endometriosis</i>
32	<i>Alone</i>
33	<i>Ten</i>
34	<i>Breathe</i>
35	<i>What to Expect When You're Expecting Nothing</i>
40	<i>When People Ask: Will You be Having More Children?</i>
41	<i>Stunning Agility</i>
42	<i>Be Warned: We Are Not Afraid to Tear Through This House</i>

Contents

43	<i>The Graveyard</i>
44	<i>Deathbed Regrets</i>
45	<i>The Summer of Jolene</i>
47	<i>Look how I move</i>
48	<i>Coming Clean</i>
49	<i>I Was Not Aware</i>
50	<i>Untitled</i>
51	<i>Girls on Shower Floors</i>
52	<i>New PM</i>
53	<i>Resilience in Plants</i>
54	<i>Chile</i>
55	<i>Close Shave</i>
56	<i>Joys of Maintenance</i>
57	<i>Disconnected to Connect</i>
60	<i>Look how I move</i>
61	<i>Look how I move</i>
62	<i>A Love Letter to My Body After Miscarriage</i>
63	<i>Grey-Eyed</i>
64	<i>Good Sick</i>
65	<i>My Relationship with a Girl Named Winter</i>
66	<i>I Used to Work at Panera Bread</i>
67	<i>Books as a Guide for the Female Journey</i>
70	<i>Orange County</i>
71	<i>Dysphoria</i>
72	<i>Blood Red Consequences</i>
73	<i>Let's Face it, You're Special</i>
74	<i>A Dreamt a Child is a Gift, Not a Gender Reveal</i>
75	<i>Breaking Waters</i>
77	<i>Farts and Other Pleasurable Hassles</i>
78	<i>On the Nightly News</i>
79	<i>some say she doth __ too much :: On forms (and performances of speech)</i>

Word from the editor

JILLIAN BOOR

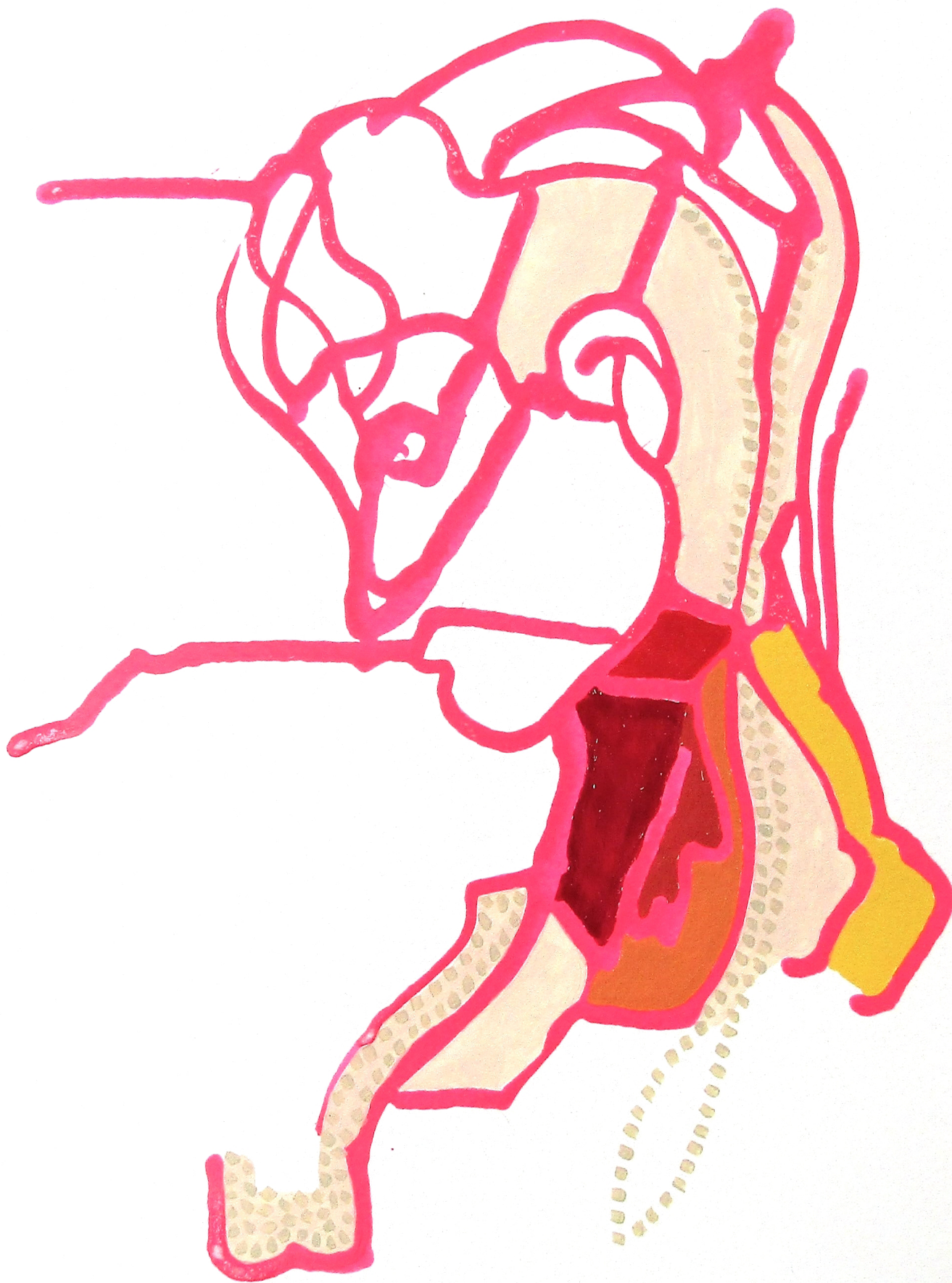
When I started to think about the theme for the first issue of Musing Publications, it became abundantly clear to me what an important and moving topic this would be. After the attack on reproductive rights at a national and Supreme Court level in the United States, I knew this had to be it. It seems like nothing is protecting us from the tyrannical patriarchy at this moment in time, and I know it has personally left me feeling very scared and frustrated. But as I began to read through the submissions that came to me, I began to feel a sense of hope. Hope in knowing that my fear was not unwarranted. Hope in knowing that other people were shouting about these things too – trying to make noise amongst the sea of people trying to drown feminist voices out.

I also began to think a lot about my own feminism and place in the feminist movement in the past few months. At one point in my life it seemed like enough to call myself a feminist and not really dive into what I meant when I said it. But as time has gone on I've started to wonder which of my values were the ones that made me feel so strongly about feminism and moving it forward? Did some of my desires make me a bad feminist? *Is there a such thing as a bad feminist?*

With the age of the internet in full swing, it seems that everyone has begun to carefully craft their own definitions of feminism and how it serves them. Which is exactly what you will see here in this issue. Each of our contributors defines feminism in unique and beautiful ways. It's truly something amazing. The writing and art you will see in this issue will leave you feeling more and more hopeful about feminism and the way the movement is trending.

I can't begin to thank the contributors in this issue enough. From believing in a small, start-up publication to sharing their life experiences with us in such a vulnerable way – they are what makes Musing Publications possible. To read more about them and find them on social media, please head over to our website to join me in thanking them for their voices.

We hope you enjoy.



Flow Portrait No. 11 *Becky Chase*

To Secure History

Aleena DeStefano

Men reach to kiss history with tainted lips.
They need no bruised elbows to shove
nor feeble lips to cry.
Their ears are deaf to the calls left behind.

I,
I see each cry
Taste each drop on my tongue
Feel each tremor pulse through my veins.

Gowns smothered by suits
A beard, some say, is finer
History cackles with sharp teeth
and tastes the tears that run between them

I gather the gowned and the feminine
Into the crook of my arms
and guide them
Into the pages where men would have sat.

I press the crown into her hair
I seat them into the lap of a throne
I place her at the head of a victorious battlefield
I place them where I will force history to glance

History will close its teeth
and the women
Will smile
From their proper seats.

The Novel

Aleena DeStefano

The Novel looks up with eyes
like dimmed stars
from a galaxy
that has wandered into the void

Where are the men?
It asks
I was told
The men would be here

Pages have been stained
by ink poisoned lies.
And now The Novel
wonders; what is truth?

The women
I say
They are supposed to be there
They were always meant to be there

No!
The Prejudiced cry to History
Craft me a fiction in the name of
those that society adores more!

The women cower
The Novel curls into itself
and I,
I lift the quill into stained hand
and write History's agonizing
silence.



Look how I move *Kristine Narvida*

M.I.S.A.N.D.R.Y

Sadee Bee

Men draw their own ire and pretend not to know where it comes from /

It is no secret who this world was built for, nor the backs they built it upon /

Silencing the very voices that gave them their names. Sowing their seeds only to leave them behind. They misuse, abuse, destroy, and never attempt to rebuild, replenish, or redesign /

And they will cry from the rooftops, “*not all men!*” /

Never considering, there is no way to truly know which one. As if the minds of women could read the minds of men /

Denying the fact they cannot. Assessing danger lies in the nature of knowing one’s true character; often not revealed until it is too late. Clever ruses and sculpted masks hide intentions, disguise the true nature of a predator /

Rewriting the history of this collective pain is impossible. No, we must dismantle, re-educate, and raise boys into men that know the word - no, that respect and protect it. Rather than daughters that must learn to guard, to be quiet, and to fight /

You want the hate of men to cease, we hear that loud and clear. Always over the voices of others desperately trying to speak their truth. Over women begging to be safe. Try the silence you so desperately want us to embody. When you finally start to listen, you may come to understand the ire you create /

Fifty Shades of Blue

Sabina Malik

Lolita rode the aerofoil up to the 50th floor of the Broad Corporation. This CEO was a real piece of work. Not one, but *three* female employees had filed a joint report against him.

Lolita's ears popped—ascending fifty floors in five seconds was absurd. The second the aerofoil seal snapped open, she marched straight into Landon Spaulding's office.

The robot assistant manning his front desk flashed at her to stop, but she just ignored it.

Landon's sapphire eyes penetrated her caramel ones. *"What can I do for you?"*

Lolita paused, breathless. Landon's baby blues had left her at a loss for words. She cleared her throat, regaining her composure.

"Mr. Spaulding, I'm Detective Lolita Shah with the Misogyny Crime Unit," she said, momentarily distracted by the contour of Landon's perfect jawline. Lolita was having a Fifty Shades moment—you know, the scene where Anastasia and Christian Grey meet in his office for the first time...

"Sir, three women at your company have filed a harassment claim against you. I'm fining you \$5000 for violating Article 32 of the Misogyny Act."

Landon's smile faded. *"What did I do wrong, exactly?"*

"Where do I begin?" Lolita perused her report.

"Mansplaining for one, making sexist jokes in meetings, flirting with subordinates—"

"Mansplaining!" His eyes blazed. *"Look, as CEO, it's my job to break down complex ideas into more digestible ones for our junior employees."*

She rolled her eyes. *"Junior employees who all happen to be women?"*

"Jesus, I had no idea I was offending people," he said,

perfectly rumpling his blond waves. *"Nobody said anything to me."*

"Mr. Spaulding, it's 2039. You need to be more self-aware."

Landon's face crumpled, and Lolita momentarily felt sorry for him. But in this day and age, making the female employees in your own company feel uncomfortable? Honestly.

In 2032, with no end in sight to the patriarchy, Congress passed the Misogyny Act. Ass slapping, mansplaining, catcalling, surprise kisses—all became grounds for being fined by the police. The Act served to hit men where it hurt, using a language they could understand: cold, hard cash.

Lolita scanned Landon's thumbprint with her smartwatch, sending him a ticket and invitation for a volunteer four-week feminism seminar. God, he smelled good—like ripe tangerines in a pine forest after a thunderstorm. Stupid pheromones.

**

Lolita tapped her temple to listen to the new thriller she'd uploaded to her mind cloud. Monday nights, she taught *Feminism 101* to men at the college, except no one ever showed. She was disappointed at first, having designed the curriculum in her younger, more idealistic days. But, men.

"Am I late?" Landon walked into her classroom.

Startled, Lolita sprang to her feet.

"Good to see you again." He touched her shoulder.

She could feel her cheeks burning.

Landon sat down and pulled out his digipad.

Lolita took a calming breath. The last thing she needed in her life was a carbon copy of her skirt-chasing father.

"Before we start today's lesson, do you have any questions?"

Landon's hand shot up.

"Yes?"

"I got a jump start on the course reading. I have a question about the Handmaid's Tale."

Lolita's eyes narrowed. She'd assumed her attraction to Landon was social conditioning, or some endangered ingredient in his woodsy aftershave, but perhaps she'd underestimated his intelligence.

For the next month, Lolita and Landon spent Monday nights debating Maya Angelou and Sylvia Plath. She found herself surprised by his intelligence, kindness, and the depths of his compassion for others.

On the last day of class, he asserted: *"I worry the glass ceiling will ruin my sister's dream of becoming a molecular surgeon."*

Lolita had no response.

One week later, Lolita stared listlessly at her office computer, thoughts of Landon swirling in her brain. Ugh, why was she being such a girl? She loved her perfect little man-free life: simple, neat, uncomplicated.

"Landon Spaulding's here to see you," her robot assistant trilled.

Lolita choked on her black coffee. *What the hell was he doing here?*

Landon walked in wearing a suit that perfectly complimented his cornflower blue eyes. Had his eyes always been that color? She could have sworn they were deep teal. *Christ Lolita, stop it!*

"I'm surprised to see you." Lolita motioned to the chair in front of her desk.

He sat down and ran his shaking fingers down the sharp crease of his pinstripe trouser leg.

"Ms. Shah—"

"Call me Lolita."

"Okay, Lolita, I came here to thank you."

"To thank me?" She quirked an eyebrow.

"Because of your course, I've improved the relationships with all the women in my life—my coworkers, my sisters...my mom." He stared into her eyes. *"You changed my life."*

Lolita's jaw hit the floor. Never in her life had a man made such an admission. Usually when she apprehended men, they laughed in her face, unable to see their behavior for what it truly was: blatantly sexist!

"I have a gift for you." He handed her a small, neatly wrapped package.

She carefully undid the lily-scented paper. Inside was a copy of the *Bell Jar*. Where did he get this? The world had recycled all paper books years ago.

She looked at him doe-eyed. *"Thank you. This is so thoughtful."*

His beautiful lips unfolded into a smile. *"Would you like to have a drink with me sometime?"*

And there it was. Landon Spaulding hadn't changed a bit. She gave him a scalding look.

"No pressure." He jumped to his feet. *"Here's my card. It has my number."*

After Landon left, Lolita folded up his card and tossed it in the trash.

She'd never known a man to change—not her exes, any of the perps she'd apprehended, or her father.

What was the point of her work, if nothing ever changed? Surely she could go on one date with Landon, just to see? Opening up her heart to someone was hardly anti-feminist.

And Landon was so hot!

Lolita retrieved Landon's card from the bin. Okay, she'd call him. Cause she had to have some faith in mankind.

P o i s o n

Adora Williams

Perhaps the scorpion will never come to where his ancestor was murdered.
Perhaps it will be engraved in his DNA and that says a lot about
us.

Perhaps the man never sought a mother in the lover
While they play with nipples, fucking hard,
Milk blows in the mouth.
Is it the sainted mother or whoresome lover?

The man seeks a mother in the lover
He seeks revenge.

The member lifts, the lover crawling
Kneeling, praying with her mouth full
The bottle forced
Pain caused.

In every interpretation of the act.

The man seeks a mother in the lover
Perhaps, the scorpion has no idea of cultural linear time
I go towards the scorpion, which stings me and I die
Seven hundred years and some my seventh life

I kill it for today, his descendants go back to the same place
Does the scorpion seed?

THE MENACE OF
FEMINISM.

Must Face



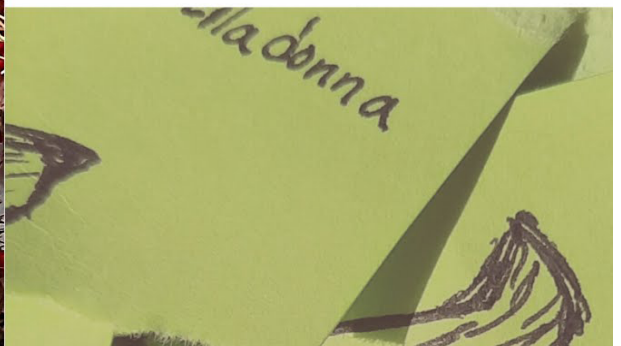
Anti-Flirt Club

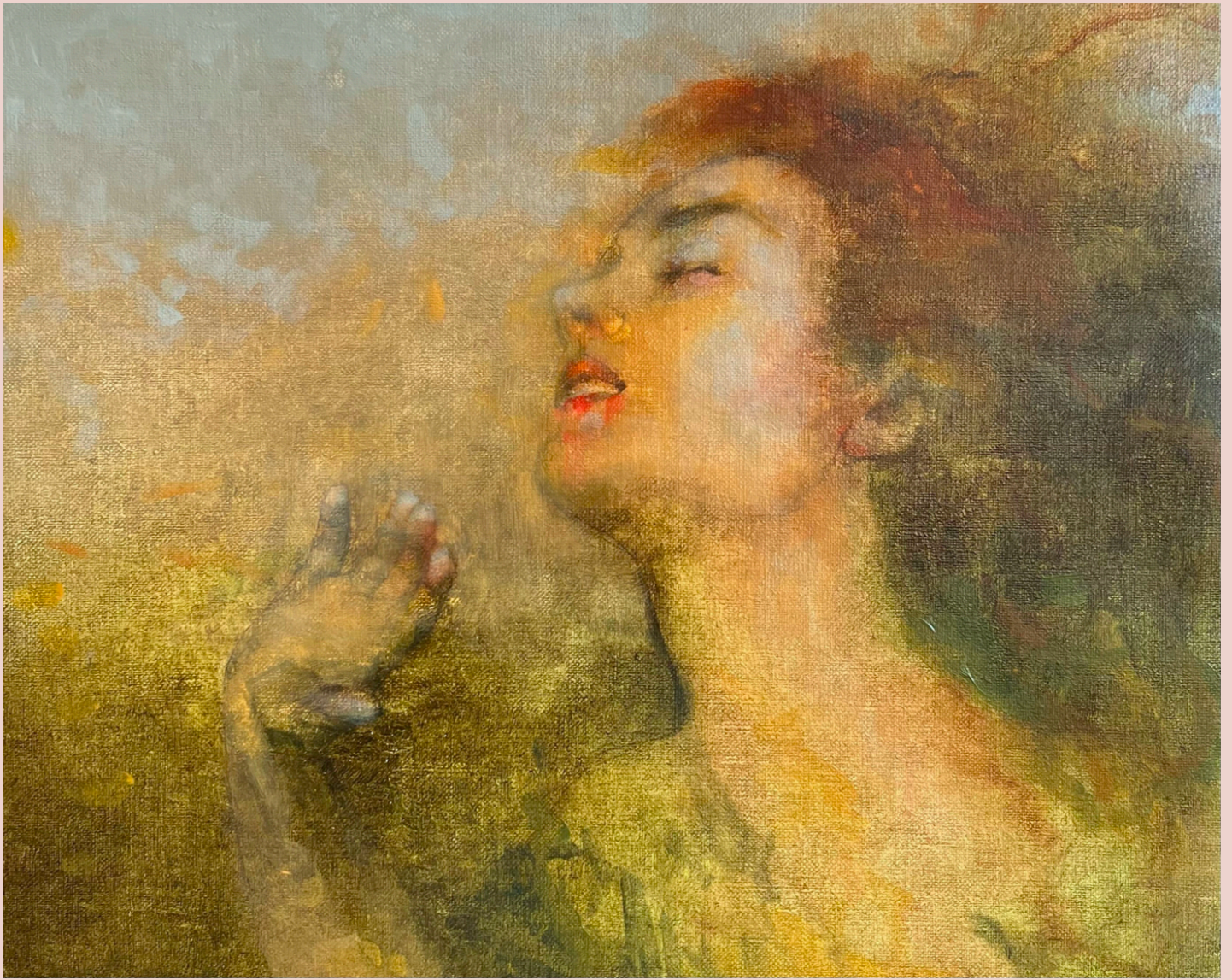
this Kind

HOURS OF KITCHEN DRUDGERY

does this body not
belong to me ?
am I not mine ?

of Freedom?





Look how I move *Kristine Narvida*

Choices

Amy Harrison

there is a sadness in all this solitude.
sitting with myself and the news
and the face of RBG staring back on my coffee mug.

a moment of silence, but not of peace.
shared with you and with me
and with hundreds of thousands
of those who have gone and will come again.

it is in the stillness i sit, thoughtfully,
melancholy, pondering the meaning
of losing my right to freedom,
of losing my right of choice.

when i rise in the morning,
i choose my outfit, my makeup, my breakfast.
when i rise with the sun,
i have the choice to decide my day,
the order of events, the things to accomplish.

i choose to work, to clean, to cook,
to shop and to write and to call my mother.
i actively seek what is right and what is good,
and i choose to love because i have the choice -

had the choice.

to them,
i am wife, i am mother.
i am sister, i am friend.
but i am also artist and listener
learner and lover.
but i haven't the choice of autonomy

i have my freedom and my rights and my dignity.
i have my life and well-being.
i have anxiety and stress,
my sleepless nights and my joyful days.
but should my body begin to change,
i have no choice over the thread of my being.

i have a choice to sit in silence,
or raise hell as so many have done.
are you listening to us?
can you hear your wife? mother?
can you hear your sister? friend?
are you listening to the artist?
the listener, the learner, the lover?
can you hear us? or have you taken our voice
as well as our choice?

On the Bench

Claire Schön

Training

Bubbles tickle my tongue, thrash my throat, numb my mind.
Drops that used to excite flow freely now expected. As much as
I want, more than I desire.

Gold cases to powder my nose, inside and out. My senses alert,
feelings muted.

The kit

Dazzle, decorate, distract draw the drapes to the soul.

Pumped full, painted, shiny and crimson. Corners set hard
in place. A flash of pearly white fortresses to hold back words
wrangling, withering. Always within.

Nothing given away: all expressions perfectly paralyzed.

In season, stamped with brands of approval. Original parts ex-
changed for plastic perkier models.

The deal

What's mine is yours. What's yours is mine.

Offsides

Tut, tut, muddy, messy, not at all ladylike. Girls don't play ball.

Neither do I; I compete.

Raised brows, ridicule, retreat.

'That won't get you off the estate. Let your lashes do the legwork.'

He never beat me at a match; I was quicker, stronger, had more control.

Showered in money, adoration and lust, he forgot where we came from, and I followed him there.

Own goal

Sensationalist screams of another sleazy scandal.

Tears taint the shine on this trophy.

Bubbles tickle my tongue, thrash my throat, numb my mind.

A kick that used to excite substituted for this life. I want for nothing; I have no desire.



IS THE PATRIARCHY SUCKING THE LIFE OUT OF YOU?



can't quite figure it out?!

QUIZ!

on the next page!

IS THE PATRIARCHY SUCKING THE LIFE OUT OF YOU?

START
HERE!

QUIZ!

A

ZEN MASTER

Ur a powerful lady who does not give a single shit. Please call me

B

READ UP + FED UP

C

DONE AF

I get it!!!! Just take a lil break from them, do something that makes you feel completely separated from the male gaze. Remember 2 breathe.



I TYPICALLY WAKE UP...

Filled w/ dread @ yet another day with men



MY FAVORITE TIME OF YEAR

When it's finally time to eat the rich



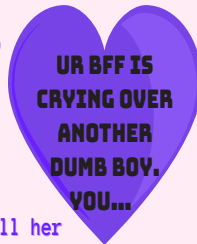
UR IDEA OF AN AWESOME WEEKEND

Buying a van, moving to Toronto + changing my name



IF I HAD TO CHOOSE MASCARA OR BLUSH

Mascara 4 blunt force, blush can be crushed + blown into attackers eyes



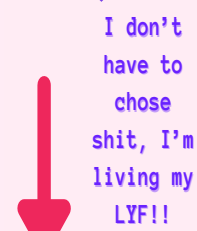
UR BFF IS CRYING OVER ANOTHER DUMB BOY. YOU...

Go 2 his house with pliers



HOW DO U REACT WHEN A BOY MAKES A JOKE ABOUT YOU?

Scream (in your head or into pillow counts)



AT THE MALL I GO STRAIGHT TO...

Fuck the mall and consumerism and messages everywhere telling me how to be a woman



A NIGHT IN WITH THE GIRLS ALWAYS LEADS TO...

Mutually amazing orgasms



MY FAVORITE FLAVOR OF ICE CREAM IS...

Pussy



A



B



C

Madison Ortega

Tarot Cards

Elisa Rivera

It was on the table laid out in rows.
The tarot cards read my sorrow
Across from me, the reader nodded
An understanding between sisters
She revealed the swords, I showed the bruises
She dealt the cups, I hid the trauma
She saw Death, I exposed my blindness
We both agreed it was time
To become the Goddess.

Nostalgia

Elisa Rivera

If this day should never end,
I wish it was the day when
I thought the world was innocent,
and round. When it didn't have ends,
it only had beginnings.
When we thought of it as *the new era*,
not as *unprecedented*.

If this day should never end
I wish it was the day when
I claimed my body as mine
and dreamt of - well, just dreamt.
But now I fight off nightmares
so my daughters can dream
for me, instead.

Justice Runs Away

Hayden Kasal-Barsky

Justice runs away
from heavy battles.
It makes the populous fight alone.
Hail liberty it screams
to crying widows,
Hail freedom it sings
to the unfree and underrepresented.
It's possible-
to see justice in our modern world
as women, men, and people of all colors,
fighting collectively.
But when justice is questioned,
or pawned off to nine reckless,
unruly of a folk,
we start to wonder
if justice has ever been with us.



Nude in Gray *Morvarid Mohammad*

Period Sonnet

We're not pregnant, we say, laughing.

Not immaculately incubating just millennially stressed.

Obsessed with calendars, clocks, and making temporary things long-lasting,
misunderstanding growing up and our bodies, but we do our best.

Begging for blood like ritual sacrifice,
building altars for our failures.

Enamored with the miracle at the apex of our thighs

Maturing in the knowledge of how and when to be carefully neglectful.

What would these premature vessels do with prizes
when they crack the clay of themselves so often?

They'd become shards of earth in doting disguises,
laughable what-if's now forgotten.

But we are safe again, bathed in crimson.

Laughing at the senselessness of possibility, potter and wheel forgiven.

Angel Dye

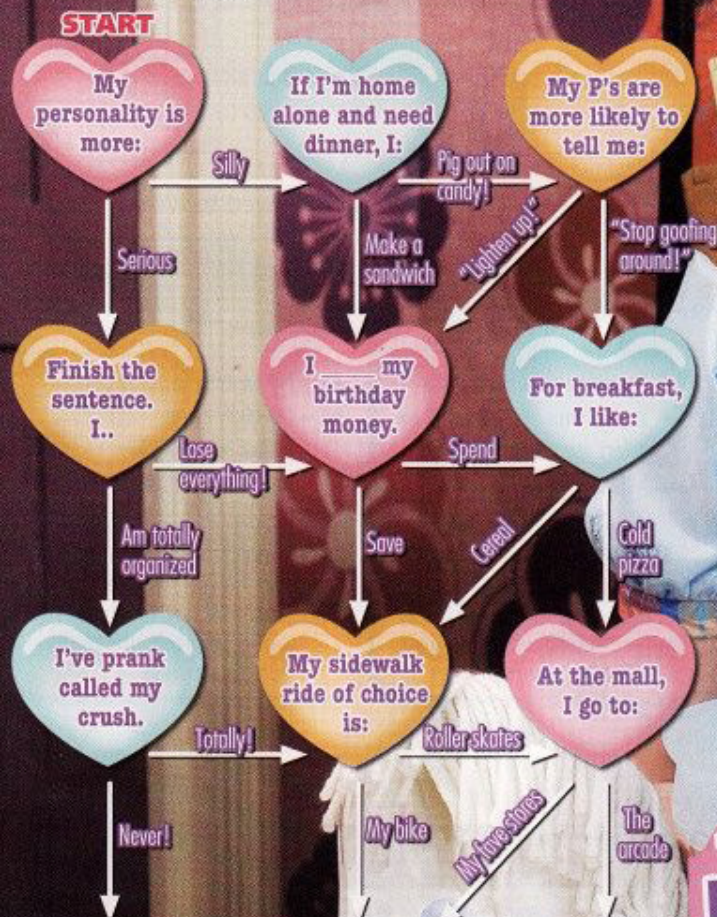


Flow Portrait No. 8 *Becky Chase*

QUIZ!

Are You Young at Heart?

Find out if you act your age!



BEFORE THEY WERE FAMOUS!

Totally Mature Girl

You are super sophisticated. You have fun in your own way by reading or watching cool new movies!

Silly But Sweet

You might still like watching cartoons, but you can be serious if you have to. You give your BFFs great advice!

Kid-like Cutie

With your kid-like fun side, you bring a huge smile to all of your best friends' faces. You're a blast 24/7!



Demi Lovato

This cutie hasn't changed much and still has the same trademark smile!



Chelsea Staub

Maybe the Jonas L.A. actress once dreamed of being a soccer star?



Jennette McCurdy

An adorable Jennette smiles big for the camera!



Taylor Swift

Taylor rocked blonde braids when she was younger!

More on Disney Channel: Demi: ch Demi; Chelsea: ch Chelsea; Jennette: ch Jennette; Taylor: ch Taylor

Molting

My skin is paper-thin these days,
falling away from me in flakes and scales,
scabbing over wounds that are not there
and refusing to hold onto anything wet.

The medicine I inject into the thick flesh
of my thigh pains me on entry
although I never see the needle.

My eyes sting and ache as a side effect of
what is supposed to be healing me.
Now I need medicine for my medicine,
a cure for the cure.

Never sure if these bags are puffs
of sleeplessness or of drug reaction.

Reading texts to memorize for
assessment and academic advancement
while winter chills everything in this apartment.

I am processing (another) breakup
and this time I am (nearly) frozen with unfeeling.
I have reverted to 2-3 dinner cocktails,
takeout containers, frivolous spending, and Netflix.

Millennial angst is never just episodic depression;
it's a high-functioning state of being.

And actually, I pray consistently.
Pay bills religiously.
Check in with my parents more,
spend therapy sessions talking
mostly about the good things.

Say I'm fine and mean it.
This one isn't a heartbreak,
doesn't hurt me the same way.
It's retractable like my meds
a sharp sting until it isn't.

Angel Dye

A Feminist Stumbles through the Eye of a Needle into a Traditional Tale, and Learns a Powerful Lesson from Pricking her Finger,

or

Sleeping Beauty and the Seven Pricks.

Once upon a time (last week in fact) and not very far away (the biggest city in the land), there lived a plucky feminist who'd worked hard to land her dream job in the costumes department of a major TV company.

One day Talia (our feminist) was smocking an Edwardian linen blouse for a drama-doc about Emmeline Pankhurst, when her phone buzzed with a text from over-eager suitor George (incapable of understanding her request not to text her at work). The sudden noise made Talia prick her finger on her needle, and she fell into a deep, deep sleep.

Talia awoke in a crumbling ruin of a castle, overgrown with briars, shrouded in a swirling mist from which an ethereal figure gradually resolved.

I'm your Adviser. My job title used to be 'fairy godmother' but apparently that's 'archaic' now.

Talia jabbed her sore finger at the ~~fairy~~ adviser, yelling that this was a mistake, she'd never even touched a spindle, she needed to get back to fucking work, and she hadn't the slightest interest whatsoever in marrying - let alone marrying an entitled, sodding prince.

No dice. You pricked your finger and here you are. In an enchanted sleep.

Talia started to panic, and the ~~fairy~~ adviser handed her a paper bag to breathe into.

*Princes are no longer approved procedure – too much baggage. Also, efficiency targets mean the 'hundred years' deal is off; you won't even notice you've been gone. We fair... erm... Advisers exist to empower women in relationship choices; marriage is 100% optional, and frequently not advised **at all**. Oh, and I'm contractually obliged to inform you that, in line with Covid safety protocols, kisses are no longer available as a wake-up mechanism.*

She passed Talia a dog-eared laminate to read.

Someone noticed your recent “struggles” in the dating department.

The list – entitled *Seven Pricks to Avoid When Dating* – read like an evocation of all the awful men Talia had dated.

Prick One, *The Flaky Fuckboy*, perfectly described Adam, her first boyfriend.

Prick Two – *The Cont-Rollercoaster* – was Ben to a T, using the threat of break-up to control her.

Pricks Three and Four – *Gaslighting Mansplainer* and *Very Obvious Cheat* – summoned unwelcome memories of Clive and Darren, while Prick Five – *Guy Who Never Shuts Up* – caused Talia to briefly relive the constant earache she’d suffered when dating Elliott.

Big Baby (Prick Six) triggered flashbacks of Fraser, whose inadequacy had initially made Talia feel needed, until she realised that he was, simply, inadequate.

The ~~fairy~~ adviser snatched back the card.

I’m afraid I can’t let you keep this - budget cuts and so on. We’ve even had to start laminating; tears and snot are no friends to cardboard.

*Seven is the worst prick of all. The Self-Pitying ‘Nice Guy’. That male friend who bleats “friendzone” if you turn him down. Well, Newsflash, Lady! – just ‘cause he forked out on some big romantic gesture doesn’t obligate **you** to ‘give him a chance’.*

Talia’s phone buzzed again and, in a trice, ruined castle and ~~fairy~~ adviser vanished. Talia was back at work. With yet another text from George.

Despite her sore finger, she texted fast:

Not tonight. In fact, not ever. We’d never work.

Then she blocked his number.

Damn, but that final piece of advice was worth pricking her finger for.

And Talia lived happily ever after.

Jo Clark

I Will Make Waves

Faith Thurnwald

Call me fourth wave,
The way I sexualize,
The way I wave away my morals -
for you.

You like your women shaved
So I'm bare.
You bear with me
As I clean down there.

I'll fourth wave
the night away;
Riding waves of pleasure -
with you.

But I swim between waves,
I'll dig my fingers into the sand
and
Hold my breath.

I'm third wave
The way I choose,
and my choice is you.

I'm second wave
The way I hit back,
Hold the sand,
With my desperate hands.

I'm first wave,
The way I'm always right.
I just hope I'm not wrong in
wanting you.

I'll hold my breath as this wave
washes over me,

And then we'll see.

ignorant advice for not drowning

Margaret Kaprielian

Not all oceans are petrifying,
but that doesn't mean
there aren't ones that will suffocate you in the depths of despair,
enclosing your throat from the once free air

They will drag you down,
as your ears start to ring -
pounding as intensely as a somber thunderstorm.
Thumping along with your hasty heartbeat,
as you unwillingly spiral down
into the inescapable deadly abyss.

While your fog-stained eyes
tell stories of utter anguish,
your mind becomes an ill-fated sheet of ice.
You feel frozen in a graveyard of fish bones.
You have no idea if you'll ever make it home,
or if you are doomed to suffer
like every sailor never heard from again.

But you never wanted this to happen.
You just wanted to float close to the shoreline,
or to have water from the surf splash at your ankles,
or even to stay dry on the secure sand.
But you never consented to drowning.

Now, as you stumble
and bellow
and sob,
you screech for help from above the surface.
The echoes of the feral sea silence your voice,
leaving you alone - with no one to answer -
in the disturbia of the vast tide.

And if you do manage to crawl yourself back to shore,
Exhausted, but alive
Traumatized, but alive.
Forever scarred with saltwater lungs,
but alive.
A seagull greets you pathetically,
Squawking with judgemental eyes that warn you to cover up,
eyes that want you to conceal your body
as if it was a shameful distraction,
Maybe, then
you wouldn't have been engulfed by the ocean
in the first place.

Sketches from a Two-Decade Battle with Endometriosis

Kara Dunford

*Have you tried Tylenol?
Or, you know, getting pregnant?*

The rage pours out of me
in every expected way, gushing
like the flow of blood that had driven
me into his care.

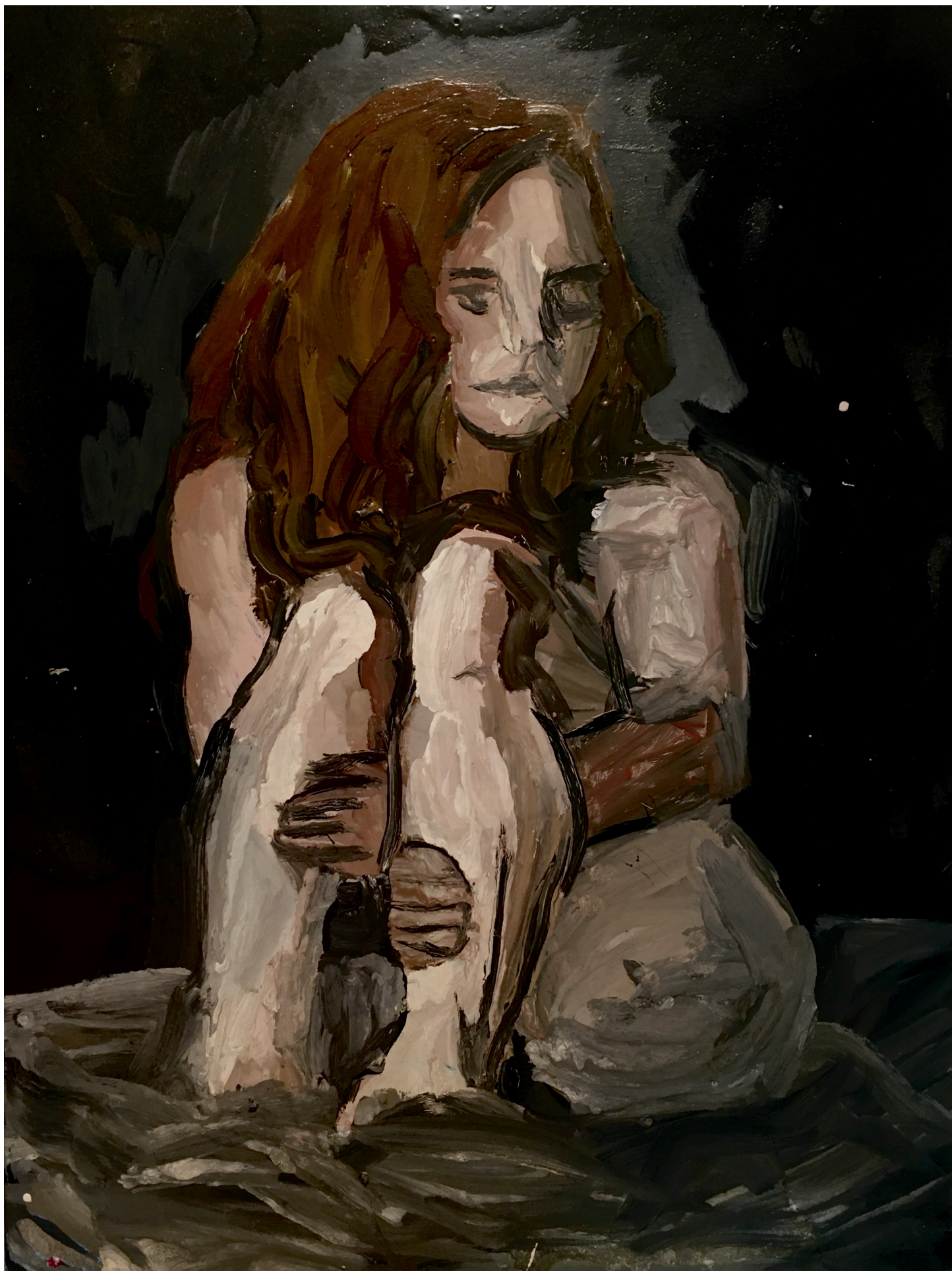
The clock is ticking on IVF.

My despair pierces the room,
sharp and scorching like the agony
that has engulfed my insides
every debilitating day.

Many a conversation laced with the presumption
that the fruit of my womb was the fruit of my worth,
the inaccuracy of a tired certainty.

My pain buried beneath these priorities,
ignored, discredited, questioned,
never wanting anything so much as to be seen.

As to gain voice and to say:
It is my body, it has always been my body.
It is my choice, it has always been my choice.



Alone Morvarid Mohammad

Ten

Rachel Loughlin

Confetti freckles,
Missing tooth -
This is ten.
My therapist says
To do inner child work
I should tell her:
She is safe now.
Attorneys told me
To take care: women
don't really own their bodies
It's written in the law.
Preachers told me
Women are things to be given
It was written in the prophets
A sweet sacrifice
Even if blood never comes.
I should tell her:
She is safe now
She couldn't have known
There was never risk of fire
For what happened
Before even knowing
The words for it
The politicians say
There are no exceptions.
My daughter is ten,
She just lost a tooth.
I speak anatomy and consent
Like incantations
Apotropaic magic
How I learned too late
The life we choose first
Must be our own
I should tell her:
She is safe now
But all the women
I have been
Will not lie.

Breathe

Diane Gottlieb

You're in line at the bar at Shari Saltzman's Bat-Mitzvah, and you're already pissed at your husband. This is 2000, when men are still expected to do the line-waiting—at least for the drinks. After all, they stand to gain the most if they get you drunk. That's how the story goes, or went, or whatever. But he *is* your husband, and stories grow tired, so you stand and you wait in pointy-toed heels that give your feet a headache.

The night was supposed to be fun. Black-tie, twelve-piece band, two chocolate fountains—one flowing with dark, the other with sweeter milk chocolate. But still the bartenders make you wait for ten minutes (which seems like twenty) for a god-damned screw-driver (which seems like it's half-filled with ice and not nearly enough vodka). Finally you sit down, to the left of the oversized band at the round table for twelve, layered with linens, lovely purples, light blues (Shari's favorite colors), goblets sparkling with water, cut crystal for wine, flutes alive with pink bubbly, he's sitting there, waiting. Your husband of fifteen years.

Fifteen years. Where did it go? The story? The fairytale? He's no longer your shiny knight. Gone are his princely charms. So you tap him, hard, to get his attention, and you ask him a question. It's been long on your mind.

Are you having an affair?

He looks at you, soft, and you know. You've always known. Even so, he answers his three-letter word: *Yes*. And *yes* hurts. But you laugh. You kick off your glass slippers. They've been suffocating your toes. And you learn what it feels like to breathe.



What to Expect When You're Expecting Nothing *Quincey Spagnoletti*



What to Expect When You're Expecting Nothing *Quincey Spagnoletti*



What to Expect When You're Expecting Nothing *Quincey Spagnoletti*



What to Expect When You're Expecting Nothing *Quincey Spagnoletti*



What to Expect When You're Expecting Nothing *Quincey Spagnoletti*

When People Ask: *will you be having more children?*

We are a constellation of three
twinkling in peace, primrose and yellow.

Aquila, Cygnus, and Lyra the Summer Triangle.

We oust ourselves to the earth,
smudging our bare feet on hardwood floors

and brick-patio outdoors
where we roast s'mores in the fire pit,

the pearl-gray moon
shimmying above. We are in love

with the space we give ourselves,
this place where we surrender

to both balance and breath. I tousle
my child's curls, stroke her cheek,

wrap a finger around her baby toe,
let her know that we planned

for her, that she is special and our only.

But won't she be lonely? Their words press
into us like fingers, bruising.

Let them imagine me as more
than thigh and bosom, the starry-eyed

Mother. Let the galactic pull of self-
recognition sweep us across and over,

like a planetary ring fashioned
into slingshot. We are hot, celestial

bodies, making spectacles of ourselves.

Daniela Sow

Stunning Agility

Daniela Sow

I won't be your klipspringer,
easy prey between blades of grass.

I won't show my straight horns, ringed
at the base—how they glint in summer heat.

Bent low, close to the gophers' rocky mounds,
you won't spot my coat bristling

with white markings. With you,
it's always about game. The prickle of sweat,

of thrill, of my fear, of my hooves prancing
away, quick and light, inches from your drool-

ing jaws. I won't be your sweet deer,
served on a platter in your delicatessen,

tufts of tail garnished by my dried blood.
You deserve a kick in the mouth

for what you think you can do to me.
I'm not yours. I never was.

Be Warned: We Are Not Afraid to Tear Through This House

like wildfire. You can try
 to put us out but we will still do
what we fucking want. We spread
and we spread and we climb over the slopes,
 eloping arm in arm,
choking out your thin, unspooled
hoses, charcoaled and sputtering. Dry heaving.

What's wrong, baby? Do you know yet what it means
to suck the life out of someone, against their will?

Be warned: we are not afraid to melt the metal
of your barbed fence, how you play gatekeeper
one state to the next. Our wombs loom
collectively, bellies engaged, flexing under fiery
breasts and a silver moon. Take your tank truck and tools
it's too late, baby. This torch is moving
without you because you couldn't move fast enough.
We're spreading and smoldering, parallel to the wind.

Be warned: we are not afraid to belt
our blues, singing until singed
bodies piled sky-high,
higher than these flames.
No, we will not behave. Debris, timber litter, the low-lying
Oh, you. Now, no one is safe.

But go ahead
with your strip burning,
salvage what you can
while you still can.

We are not afraid
of becoming fire whirl frenzy,
updraft untreated.

Are you?

Daniela Sow

The Graveyard

Elizabeth Wall

The mailbox yawned like an old mouth with a single postcard on its tongue. I held its crisp edges in my hand - the gray-blue background of the card segmented by the black and yellow of the shadows and moon. The graves on the front were an interesting choice and reminded me of the story of how when you were sixteen, you lost your virginity in a graveyard to a boy who shot himself once he became a man. Virginity is one of those words that feels like broken glass in my mouth. A man says it has value and therefore it does, but you aren't worth less after the first time than you were before. It's another way to subjugate women and enslave their wombs; a way to dictate what we can or cannot hold within our bodies. Old, flaccid, white men say you're allowed to if you're married, but if not, then you shouldn't dare allow the penetration of your sacred chalice. Don't disturb the thing that is the vessel for life. Even if you don't want it and don't want him. What if you want a woman? Keep the whispers low and longing glances short because they're always planning the chiseling away of our right to privacy, and it breaks apart like egg-shelled mica. *Hello from Hell. Wish you were here*, the postcard reads, signed with an X and an O. I'm already there, with you, in the graveyard where our rights lie freshly buried.

Deathbed Regrets

Elizabeth Wall

It's the deathbed visions of deep regret that yank me back and make me cringe at the likelihood I will grieve for a life half-lived when I am near death and the shrinking future is waiting. It's the shame that will fill my tired body like freshly poured concrete. At not running toward the unknown/at standing still because I shouldn't complain/because I should be content with good enough.

should be/should be/should be/should/should/should

the internalized mantra on eternal repeat: girls should be thin/neat/smiling/not be aggressive/or imperfect/they shouldn't think about themselves first, or maybe at all. So, we have generations of women who take care of others but never themselves until there is an epidemic of opiate abuse and alcoholism/perfectionism/all the isms so we can cope with skinning ourselves to the bone. And yet, in my daughter I see a new generation that fights and unites against these outdated norms. I am cautiously hopeful they won't carry as large a millstone, and perhaps, in time, they will even break it.

The Summer of Jolene

on acceptance notes & bank rolls

i spent an early 90s summer – one with high temps & higher hair – as a bank teller and quickly realized the job (& life) was much more than counting bills. withdrawals often exceeded deposits. life savings often far less quantifiable than the sum of weekly checks. unexpected armour & armored trucks always waiting – all motors on idle.

i worked drive-through most tuesdays and thursdays. managed closing most mondays, wednesdays, and fridays. shifts and stations crisscrossed with the noon hour. none of us eager to log on, or off, too soon.

we'd spot hundreds for a lad in a backwards-facing baseball cap while we watched him nurse symptoms of withdrawal. the lad wanted no parts of conversation. all four of us tellers longed to scribble words of caution, if not prayer, on the crisp bills. policy prohibited any such forms of communication. we needed our checks.

we'd check all bills for legitimacy and all signatures for fraud. often at the knees and knickers of illegitimate interactions. all while serving curiously curated couples and soon to be committed frauds. money is indeed dirtier than toilets.

we'd raise paper to light and count fifties for settlements on nights before fights. we'd explain coin roll procedures and count coins in canvas satchels. cash signed checks and trade quarters for pennies. produced both seed and feed for duck ponds and music row wishing wells. many would cheat. everyone eats. none of it easy. all of it ours. a daily feat.

we'd apply policy while acquiring local politics. manuals for mostly manual labor. technology not yet in tune or of the times. computed change carefully and yearned for changed circumstances. performed feats of addition and subtraction in well-coifed heads, while trading barbs with well-oiled, sometimes soiled, men. built leaning towers of potential. polished pennies. ate cut sticks of celery. sometimes carrots. traded achievements – \$2 sightings included.

most mornings we'd open up shop with 9 to 5 on the overhead speakers. most afternoons we'd stream *Jolene* mainly because we could. management mostly soft. on, in, and around the middle. positioning the radio dial became a form of resistance if not rebellion in a carefully choreographed circus of delights. money, moments, and mediocrity on perpetual display. dolly released the song in 1973. decades had danced since, but we counted coins not time. meters not minutes. rhythm not rhyme. we worked in a temperature-controlled tank and monitored tempers. money more similar to fuel than desire.

we'd cash allowance checks for women in nylon joggers and girls in three-inch skirts. counted twenties for pizza runs. fifties for casino nights. hundreds for heroics unknown. we'd greet then treat married men with girls twenty years younger hooked on arms. we became experts on money trivia – martha washington the rare woman on u.s. currency /

queen elizabeth ii broke appearance records / paper money isn't made of paper. and filled glass bowls of individually wrapped after five mints (usually a few minutes before five) while handing out coloring books on the u.s. mint.

our tables were stocked of reading materials -- mostly solicitations and salutations. digests for bankers and readers. we'd thumb through stacks of reader's digests in between clients. watched as a single half of a long-standing pair opened safety deposit boxes. valuables would vary. tears would stream. we'd work the crossword (sometimes knock-knocks) and toss the sweepstakes. before and after sweeping the lobby (of boat dust and diapers).

none of us had red hair, though we talked about dye in between drive-through exchanges. *Jolene* was a reflection of each of us. and all of us. orange crush a constant favorite at the vending machine. crushes on customers equally popular. *Jolene* hit no. one on the charts. we too hit our marks. the bank made records at the drive-through. all cans vacuum sealed. all transactions timed. ultimately, we accepted each other's genuine selves as readily as we accepted deposits. no tolerance for counterfeits or miscounts. tooled temperaments for misfits or culture shock. all combinations safe. all safes secure.

i spent an early 90s summer -- one with high temps & higher hair -- as a bank teller and quickly realized the job (& life) was much more than counting bills. each of us played our own cards with our own favorites. not of nickels and dimes, but of fairy tales and fabricated ails. what ails you, we'd say as our make-believe beaus (with big dreams and faded jeans) would come ready to banter. all patrons living a life of dreams (pleasures and payments) during our 9 to 5 -- *only dreamin*. we'd flirt with what ifs all while squarely grounded in the workings of our 9 to 5s. each of us on the minimum wage clock while lost in dreams.

each of us lost in a lyric and a little *jolene*

12 (plus) ways to accept a deposit

1. accept all notes. note all acceptances
2. layer longings. loop lyrics
3. stream dreams on radios -- dials turned right
4. deposit dreams in safes -- dials turned left
5. fade denim, not dreams or dares
6. cash checks (and specks), count coins (and pecks)
7. make more than money. memorize more than what is made
8. check paper and currency for validity. validate conversation
9. finesse fine lines at the intersection of il(legitimate) transactions
10. live a life of pleasures and payments. work a 9 to 5 while dreamin'
11. apply minimums to wages. resist maximums on wagers
12. secure mints of many flavors (and favors)

lose oneself in a lyric, and a little *jolene*

Jen Schneider, previously published in Voicecatcher



Look how I move *Kristine Narvida*

Coming Clean

Sandra Salinas Newton

I have been silent for too many years.
Keeping the secret story of you,
the older man seducing me to you
with your captivating ways.

I resisted feebly because
there was so much that tempted me.
On the cusp of twenty-one:
the crisp-linen French dinners,
the quaint Hungarian cafes,
recalling a Europe I'd never seen,
the hot nights of sweaty desire
and you...

Stories you told,
of a wild Berlin -
one that tolerated Hitler
until his comical minions
took their revenge.
Stories of a youth spent in luxury
but wasted with medical studies
and accommodating women;
Of killing Soviet soldiers
yet drinking while other allies
flew overhead, unharmed;
Of escaping the bombardments
but never forgetting them.
And the story of finding New York -
just another Berlin, but tamer -
and finding me...

I was your willing puppet:
your hand inserted in me,
controlling every move
and thrilling me like never before.
Or since.

I have had a life in which you
Were the big secret
The catalyst to growing up
The conclusion to the unsustainable
Because a more mundane life ultimately claimed me
And I gladly fled your fire
But now I come clean:
You were all to me—
My outlaw story that had to end.

I Was Not Aware

Oriana Ehlen

I was not aware as a child
that the way I was born
would set me so far apart from others.
I was not aware that something I had no choice over
meant others would use it to hurt me.

I was not aware as a child
that a good woman listens when the men speak;
knows her place and that it's not in the lead.
I was not aware good girls follow orders,
that good girls don't make a scene.

I was not aware as a child
that the thing between my legs
would set me so far apart from others.
Yet, my womb is not the only part of me that creates life -
blood shed every 28 days is not a sign of failure to create.
I was not aware that it meant others would treat me differently
when I was raised to treat everyone the same.

They speak of protecting the children.
The children's futures must be thought of!
They proclaim

They are not aware
that I was a child,
and it was my future they swore to protect

I was not aware as a child,
but I am now.

THE FUNNY DICK!

FOR THOSE LADIES
WHO JUST AREN'T
FUNNY, PUT THIS ON
AND YOU'LL
INSTANTLY BE
HALARIOUS!

BONUS!

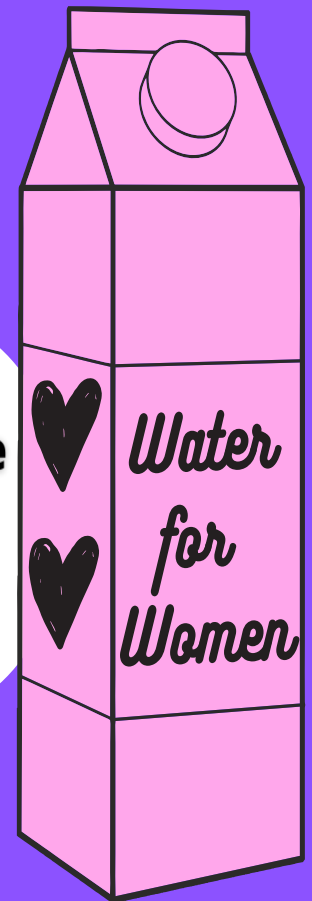
MAY COME WITH
PROMOTION!



THE CONTAINER IS PINK

That's the
whole
thing...

**ONLY
\$15.99**



VAGINA TEETH

IT'S SO YOUR
VAGINA CAN HAVE
TEETH.

**HALF
PRICE!!!**



"A DREAM COME TRUE"

THE HANDI-THONG

HIDE YOUR
DISGUSTING
HANDS!

**COME BUY NEW,
MORE SEXY
HANDS**



THE PRICE OF
YOUR SOUL

Girls on Shower Floors

Chloe Henney

how many of us are there
crying into our pillows,
flinching at a touch
I told her she wasn't alone
I told her it would get easier
but I am still repeating it over
and over
the last thing I said
the amount of gasps
falling
down
sobbing on the floor of the shower
scrubbing every inch you were near
water sinking in for hours
I still feel dirty
I still feel your hands on my wrist
but it's been years
my skin has shed several times since
and your hands are far from me
but trauma still has its grip on me
I told her she wasn't alone
I told her it would get easier
I have to believe that.

New PM

Chloe Henney

I'm a feminist so am I supposed to be grateful
that our new prime minister is a woman,
a PR pleasing opportunity, pose for a picture
are we supposed to feel connected? a sister,
a journalist will tell us this is groundbreaking
life-changing
we should count our lucky stars that we can dream
to be something men historically cherish
an understudy for when he finally relinquishes
his control
I'm a feminist so are we supposed to forgive
the impending misrepresentation?
bite my tongue on the upcoming frustration
as single mothers on the estate can't eat
or heat their house
while she wraps warm blankets round BP bosses
caring is to be expected for a woman
spit out the policies
poverty on the menu and the most effected
women

Resilience in Plants

Faith Benavides

abuela started it. she would garden in triple digit summer heat. an eighty-year-old Goddess among seedlings — gifting serenity between planter and bed, a savior dressed in dirt.

in her yard, waxy stalks of succulents grew in bunches. they filled the red earth that would have been grass anywhere else. the last time I saw her we noted the pride in its resilience. how it learned to push and seed and flourish. to endure and bet on faith. even as the house grew empty.

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Faith
Benavides

she hands us twine to wrap around the peppers
in the floral bowls at our feet.
our small fingers assemble impatient knots
that get re-tied by the
wrinkled hands held out to us
since birth.

she hangs them from the porch
to dry out in the sun—

like decorations

when it's time, she takes them down.
the speckled skin of her hands
caress the crisp hangings,
flakes off with our eagerness.

*lay them out on the table
don't touch your eyes when you're done.*

in the kitchen, oval nails tear into flesh
exposing seeds that spill across
the plastic tablecloth,
small and yellow.
she adds boiling water to the bowl,
leaves the peppers to drown and dissolve.

*it leaves the flavor but
takes the heat*

the mush she makes stings our noses,
looks red and murky and splashes a kiss
each time she drops in
a new skin.

*add the onions, slowly.
not too much, mija.*

she sings as she leads us,
carelessly, easily,

*every woman in our family knows this.
we all learned from our mama,
and she from hers.*

we watch as our paste becomes
the smooth red we crave.
our mouths water and burn.

*mira aquí, you are women,
born from this flesh.
souls knotted
with ours.*

Close Shave

Annie Liones Nyguen

if i shave off layers of skin
would i find someone under
someone with less body hair
fewer stretch marks
scars
cellulite
someone who fits into the mould
considered beautiful

if i shave off layers of flesh
would i find someone under
someone who would gain approval
without jagged flaws
quiet, demure
lesser opinions
someone who cares to please
more than to disagree

if i shave off layers of bones
would i find someone under
someone who's a good girl
honorable daughter
lesser ambitions
settling down at child-bearing age
shredded to a mere role, a wife
dissolving behind his silhouette.



Joys of Maintenance *Liz Darrell*

Disconnected to Connect

Kendra Louka

I fold over, my tight hips resisting, as I rest my forehead on the yoga mat. Reaching forward, my spine stretches as if I'm a butterfly opening her wings for the first time. This studio is intentionally hot. When I attempt this at home, my children climb all over me and laugh. Their tall mother has become a reachable jungle gym for them to conquer. Little do they realize my need for just five minutes to disconnect. Being a stay-at-home-mom allows space to reflect and sometimes the *thinking* is a faucet I need to turn off. So here I am. In a dark yoga class submerged in stillness.

Silence contrasts my loud inner dialogue. With each breath, I hush the stream of thoughts to find my beating heart. The instructor starts by inviting each of us to find a mantra to refer to when the postures get challenging. To *feel alive* is mine. To *feel alive*. Sometimes we have to disconnect from everything - the to-do lists of a competitive culture, checking social media, replying to texts, constant tabs on the kids - to reconnect to our core. Here I am. Returning to my origin: in solitude, in darkness, and in a fetal position.

As we move through the poses, she encourages in a soft tone yet the words are clear, distinct. "*You are a lotus flower, blooming in the mud for it blooms because of the mud, not in spite of it.*" I process this. I *am* a lotus flower in a muddied collection of mistakes. Mistakes I will never forget. Mistakes I am learning to forgive.

There's always an undercurrent of longing for a fresh start, to be replanted in clean, pure soil where no one knows me. To move. Start over. Show my mature, new and improved version of myself which is so much better than who I was in my twenties, but here I am, a lotus flower in the mud.

A memory returns of loud, penetrating music and a throbbing dance floor. I'm yelling at a bartender for a gimlet. I take a deep breath in through my nose, returning to the now, and exhale. Accepting the muddled past of morning hangovers and precarious situations. The things I did not accomplish.


Suddenly I'm twenty-one years old again, the alignment of many variables propelling my adult life into a new world of connecting... or so it seemed. Having just moved, being single, and drinking ridiculously expensive cosmopolitans like the women in *Sex in the City*, I was ready to connect with whom-ever came my way. How often does one have such an opportunity for a fresh start in every realm? Hello, New York City!

I would explore the Big Apple. It was electrifying. To hail a cab or see landmarks I'd only seen in movies. Although I was physically in the City of Dreams, I'd yet to socially integrate. Time to turn to the World Wide Web.

I established my identity in social media, complete with my horoscope sign (cancer), being a vegetarian, and love of travel accompanied with plenty of flattering photos. A mutual friend - who later became my best friend - saw our similarities online before meeting me in person at a get-together. Her being a cancer, vegetarian, and lover of travel was the ice breaker that began a lifelong friendship. She was my ticket into the social scene in NYC and we LIVED. IT. UP.

Work hard, play hard. I certainly did both. Eventually, I was burnt out at both ends. I connected, but to people I saw one time. Constantly pushing through the discomfort of wanting to rest with the thought of something amazing and big about to happen around the corner. No time to stop. Discouraged from this draining cycle, I made it better (or so I thought) by drinking. It was as if the one extreme of connecting to these loose-end relationships led me to disconnect with myself by numbing even more. The drastic pendulum I could no longer hold onto, swung off, and landed... hard. Until it all came to a full stop.

There are wake up calls in our lives that can shake us. Mine came when I was twenty-six years old. "*I'm never drinking again,*" I said as I sat on the bus, a wave of nausea hitting me. The night before was another blur with my best friend. We had spent it laughing, enjoying dinner, and all the while, drinking red wine... lots of it.



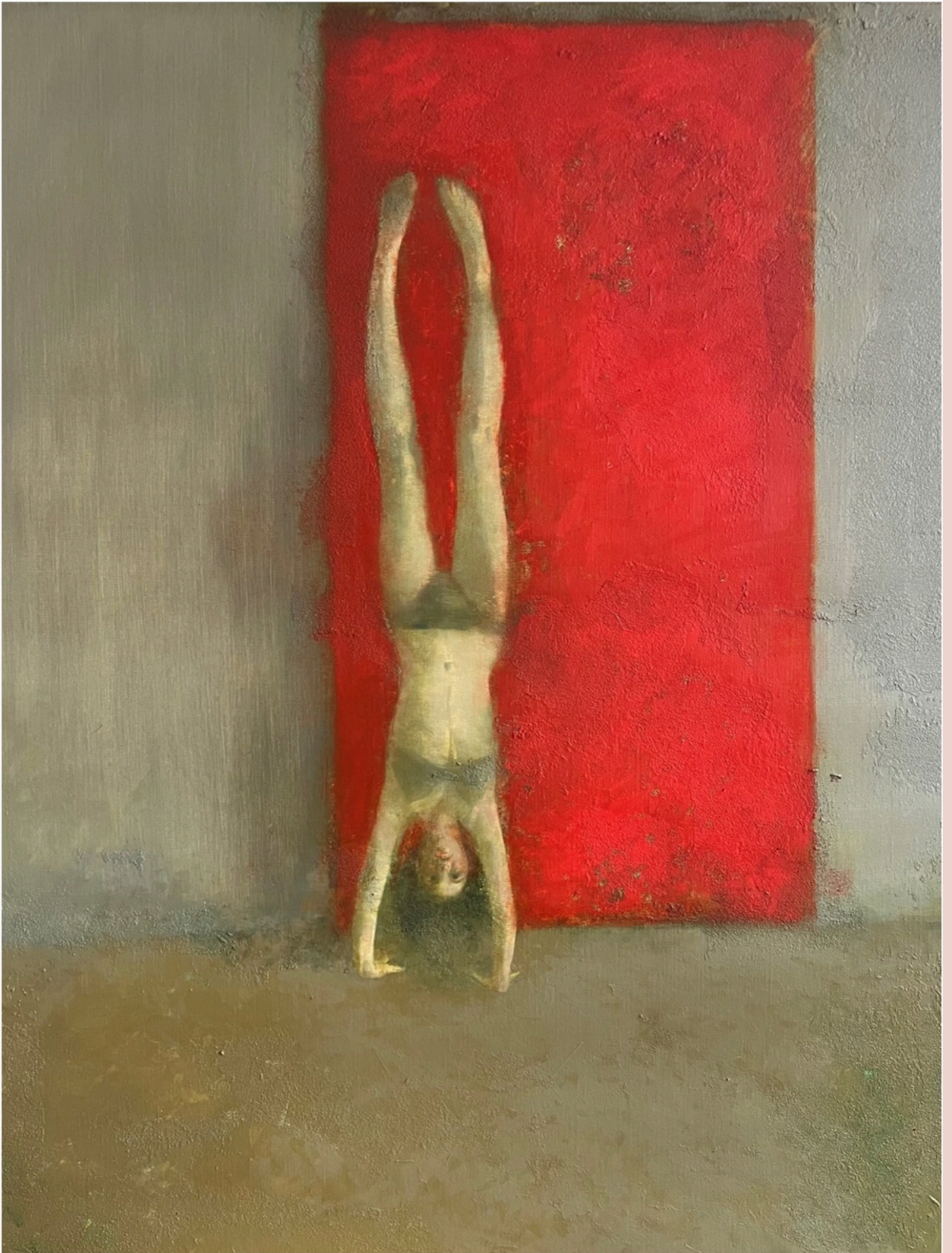
I stuck to my word, and stopped drinking, but oddly enough I stopped connecting, too. I went off the radar by deleting my social media, stopped texting, stopped calling. It was time to dig deep inside to figure things out. In this in-between time, I found yoga. Years later I got married, had kids, and created a deep bond with my family. A life full of sustenance and gratification. What I put in, I get out.

It's hard to not have regrets. I could have been more efficient with my youth, perhaps lived conventionally. There's always the stirring what-ifs and could-haves in times of stress. Sometimes, that thought is so quiet that I forget it's there. Other days it conquers me. I am a collection of my mistakes, but I am also a result of overcoming those mistakes. It's gotten me here, after all.

Life is a series of choices, opportunities, and people to create the dots on our timeline of life. In the midst of connecting those dots, the disconnect is just as important. Curled up into the child's pose, my eyes filled with sweat from performing a series of poses, the yoga class is over. I unfold myself and roll up my mat. "*On my way home*" I text my husband. He replies, "*drive safely, sweetheart*". My family's waiting for me, and I'm refreshed. Ready to connect again. Here I am, a lotus flower, and this mud is exactly what I need to bloom.



Look how I move *Kristine Narvida*



Look how I move *Kristine Narvida*

A Love Letter to My Body After Miscarriage

Dearest Body of Mine,

I love you.

I am working to release
my fear of you,
of your not-enough-ness.
But I am simultaneously
in awe of you,
of your ability to
bounce back,
your resilience,
your resolve to survive.
And live.

I'm inspired by the way
you connect
seamlessly
to my intuition.
You know what my mind does
not -
how to release,
let go,
start anew.

Tears flow when my
brain cannot say why, but
the cavity of my chest -
of my uterus -
has been trying to tell me
for days.

Even if rest does not come
easily to you,
that's actually my
brain's fault,
or capitalism's fault.
My bad.
I love you.

I am admitting to the
shadow, too.
The work that needs done:
I am working on my
anger towards you
for rejecting the tiny body
that I loved so much,

that their Daddy loved so
much, that those we love
already loved
so much.
I love you.

I am trying to remember that
the abuse you suffered at the
ultrasound appointment was
not your fault,
and that when I am
good and ready
I am allowed to release that
rage.
So that it doesn't fester
inside of us,
inside my heart,
Where the infection of
revenge once set in,
a long time ago.
I love you.

Instead, my
beautiful Body,
I will do my best
to walk through the darkness
Of my empty,
raw womb.
So that I can reclaim
what is mine.
I love you.

Thank you Crown,
for keeping me
connected to Source,
to remind me of my own Di-
vinity.
Thank you Third Eye,
for opening wide
in warning.
Thank you Throat,
for speaking truth
to my Body's power,

and power to the truth
that I am both
crushed and hopeful,
sad and smiling,
furious and gracious.
Thank you Heart,
for becoming
so big and wide for
my sweet baby to come in.
So that when they
float back down,
I love myself as much
as I will love them.
Thank you Solar Plexus,
for the confidence
of knowing that I can
survive all of this,
and that I will start again
stronger.
Thank you, Sacrum,
for holding me
steady
And keeping me safe,
despite the chaos that
raged within for hours
Of blood,
and cramping, cringing pain,
Of death.
And thank you, Root.
Thank you for planting my
feet firmly into the Earth,
to ensure that
after winter
comes re-growth,
re-birth.

I love you.

Anna See-Jachowski

Grey-Eyed

Jasminique Harris

They called her grey-eyed Athena, not for the color of her eyes,
but the quality of her gaze, stony and hard.
No wonder she created Medusa the way she did;
the maid who was punished or protected.
The gods never really understood us,
built as they are in our image,
the way we fail to see our parents
as their own people with flaws
and desires and mistakes.
We're just down here
staring up, thinking about how being
made of stone really would make the trip easier.
Maybe Medusa was doing us a favor. Maybe
Athena put a little too much of herself into her.
Stone women up and down the mountain,
it's just Medusa looking for her hard mother.

Good Sick

Jasminique Harris

mom, i feel so weak.

I've been thinking about my corpse a lot lately,
i don't think i'm beautiful.

In a dream, you are very happy and i'm a ghost
i watch you in the house by the river.

You have friends in this dream,
it's the you without me and I decide to leave her alone.

mom, i'm bleeding and i don't know how to stop it.
i wanna be like the woman in the house by the river.

No, that's not it.

i want you to be like the woman in the house by the river.
Without grief, without ghosts.

mom, i threw up and it was all black.
Won't you wash it out of my sheets?

My Relationship with a Girl Named Winter

Bailey Gee

Snow glistening,
Freezing on the ground.

It becomes
an alluring reflection
of Winter's night.

The street lights blaze,
There's a dew in the air
Below zero degrees
She reaches for my hand,

Pulls me tight,
to dance in the storm
Like a scene from a film
Her lips touch mine
It's a magical scene

Atoms;
A chemical reaction

January love
Her eyes light up
A tear falls

Snow glistening
Winter calls
Winter calls

I Used to Work at Panera

Holly Walker

i worked at panera bread in
high school, and it was baffling to me
when people told me that the wage gap
wasn't real or *didn't really matter*
when i was making eight-fifty an hour.
I had worked there for two years
when the new male hire started at eleven-fifty
for *the same fucking job*. it wasn't hard, really,
to ring up a few orders and
grab a few cookies from the bakery
to give to people
who could care less
if i got my end of the tip collection or not
and screamed at me to give them
their light-roast coffee
until it got all over my hand
and left a burn and
that was when the guilt set in.
that was when he started stammering
i'm sorry i'm sorry i'm sorry
but i couldn't look at him
i didn't have the time to look at him
i had to look for burn cream.
and sometimes when i closed,
dusting the bagel crumbs from the shelves
and from the bagel slicer,
the older twenty-year-old men would try
to sweet talk me into giving them hugs
or blowing them off in the panera parking lot
or to have a beer
at eleven on a school night
when all i wanted was a glass of water
and a reason why i still worked at this corporation
for eight-fifty an hour.
why the hell did i let them pay me eight-fifty an hour.

Books as a Guide for the Female Journey

Kellie Brown

I have always admired, and even envied, those who keep journals consistently year after year. That discipline in maintaining a record fascinates me, and yet (despite many attempts) I have failed to sustain the practice either through loss of interest or from the sense that my daily musings were too mundane, and therefore unlikely to be worth revisiting. But with the start of the pandemic lockdown, I thought I had finally found the inspiration needed for a journal that would be filled with profound meaning and insights. So dutifully, I labeled what day of lockdown I was in and recorded my thoughts and my mostly non-activities. Then three months into it, I shut down the journal project, although not for the usual reasons. I actually grew too frightened to continue because the perpetuating pandemic offered the terrifying possibility that in the future I might write a big number such as The 567th Day of Lockdown. So with the journal abandoned, I accepted that I would not emerge from this nightmare with anything resembling Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* or Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

Of course, there are other methods of documenting our journeys. Whenever I scroll back through months or years of my online calendar, I am met by not just an hour-by-hour record of classes, meetings, lunch dates, and dentist appointments, but also a surprising amount of emotion as I see the highs and lows, the easy and the hard— movie outings and rheumatologist visits. If I scan back far enough, I relive the joy of when new people come into my life and their names first appear on my calendar. Similarly, the *yin-yang* of our lives means that I also experience pangs for those whose names disappear from my daily orbit — people lost through death or circumstance. Our calendars certainly provide an illustration of the circle of life, with the ebb and flow of our humanness on full display.

Recently I was startled to discover an unexpected record of my life that even more fully captured my journey than the calendar— a sort of existential travelog through books. I am not sure why this surprised me. I have been a devout bibliophile since my earliest years when I needed my grandmother to read to me. I sat eagerly for repeated readings of Miriam Norton's *The Kitten Who Thought He Was a Mouse* interspersed with Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Once I could read on my own, it was the Scholastic Book Club, with its newsprint catalogs, that really sparked my obsession with book buying— not just borrowing, but owning. After my teacher distributed the catalog and order form, I would pour over the list for hours making my selections and trying to scrape together the necessary money. This was followed by the agonizing wait for the order's arrival. But oh, how worth it on that glorious day when my teacher placed a stack of new books into my hands that would make their way to my bedroom bookshelf. Forty years later, some of those books have survived all my moves and purges. The nostalgia for titles such as Beverly Cleary's *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* remain too strong to be parted.

This recent realization that my book purchase history served as a surrogate journal came about because an elderly friend and fellow voracious reader asked me to curate a reading list for her and so I decided to review my online book purchases. Of course, not everything I read comes via the internet, but over the past few years, much of it has due to its “open 24 hours a day” convenience. As I began to review purchases year by year, I experienced those same emotions as when I scrolled through my calendar. It was like an episode of the old 1950s television show, *This Is Your Life*. It was my life through reading, with the purchased books aligning in a quite revealing way with my circumstances— again some happy, others hard, and a few so painful that I flinched and scrolled a bit faster down the page.

For example, in late 2018, I had ordered several of Rick Steves’ travel guides for Greece, Spain, and Italy, as I prepared to take a group of university students on a humanities tour in May 2019. Seeing those purchases, I relived the excitement and the anxiety of planning that trip and then the wonderful memories of the sights, sounds, and food. I also paused in the daunting realization that I was not sure when a trip like that would feel safe again.

Throughout the years, I saw evidence of my continued collecting (I refuse to call it hoarding) of musical fiction. Since the 1990s, I have amassed a collection of fiction for all ages in which music proves essential to the story, such as its setting in an opera house or a bluegrass festival, or that its main character conducts an orchestra or plays the trumpet in a jazz band. As my collection grew, I decided to create a blog about it, which eventually became the 2005 book, *An Annotated Bibliography and Reference List of Musical Fiction*. And as they are wont to do, new titles that I had not been able to resist, aka *The Music Shop* by Rachel Joyce and *The Gustav Sonata* by Rose Tremain, took up residence on my bookshelves.

My writing life also occupied a large presence in my book buying after having signed a publishing contract in 2015 to write a book on music during the Holocaust. From that year, I began to see research sources appear in my purchase history. I could actually follow the progress of the book, chapter by chapter over the next four years, by the topics of resources I ordered— *Survival in Auschwitz* by Primo Levi, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt, *Inherit the Truth* by Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, *Forbidden Music* by Michael Haas, *Song of Survival* by Helen Colijn, *Symphony for the City of the Dead* by M.T. Anderson, and so many more.

Most recently, the pandemic gave me time to explore important works on the craft of writing and so, my 2020 shopping cart that could not find toilet paper or hand sanitizer instead opted for Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Words Are My Matter: Writings on Life and Books*, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* by Anne Lamott, and *Madeleine L’Engle Herself: Reflections on a Writing Life*. Oh, and did I mention my need for poetry to cope with pandemic life? My shelves welcomed *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*, *How to Fly (In Ten Thousand Easy Lessons)* by Barbara Kingsolver, and *Dearly: New Poems* by Margaret Atwood.

But 2020 was not a place where I wanted to linger, so I hopped to other more promising years. The closer I examined my book purchases the more I noted with curiosity which trends seemed to be specific to a particular year or season of my life and which pointed to chronic book habits. During the summer of 2016 when a painful surgery for a torn hip tendon had left me immobile for two months, I had needed to escape into *The Bookshop* by Penelope Fitzgerald and be charmed by the scrappy but beloved detective Vera Stanhope in Ann Cleeves’ series. But

regardless of the specific year, I have always felt the need to share books. I especially enjoyed tracking titles that I have gifted over and over again, including Helene Hanff's 84, *Charing Cross Road* and *Journeys of Simplicity* by Philip Harndon.

I also noticed the reordering of favorite books, most notably Gail Godwin's *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, that I frequently loan out and sometimes never get returned. A few books popped up multiple times that were not for gifts or as replacements, but books I bought and then for some reason lost the desire to read or chickened out of as was the case of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*. On March 19, 2016, I ordered a copy, knowing that it was an important feminist novel that I should read. It sat on the shelf for a while, with its intimidating cover, until I finally traded it in at a used bookstore. Then, I again decided that I should read it, and on the same month and day (truly freaky) in 2019, I ordered it again. This time, I am happy to report that I did not leave it unread.

Other classics that I had neglected slowly made their way into my shopping cart over the past few years— Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower*. Obviously, I had been avoiding dystopian worlds. Also on the list were fantastical worlds such as L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* and Le Quin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*. And as I looked from year to year, not only did I see new discoveries but also reengaged with so many old friends. Books that I had forgotten caused me to smile at their rediscovery. *In This House of Brede* by Rumer Godden and Peter Hobbs' *The Short Day Dying* fell into this category, and with my reacquaintance came a strong urge to reread them. So as a result of curating a reading list for my friend, my own long wish list has expanded by a few more titles.

Through this year-by-year inventory, I discovered that not only did these varied book interests perfectly narrate the times of my life, but that I had forged deep relationships with many of these titles and their authors. So while I may not be suited for the type of journal keeping that I had aspired to over the years, I am excited to recognize that I can still retain a record of words to revisit within the chapters of books that align with chapters of life. I can think of no better compendium.



Orange County *Morvarid Mohammad*

Dysphoria

Judgmental stares from the public eye,
Breasts hidden under oversized shirts.
Curves jutting out under men's jeans,
Hidden with sharp nails or makeup,
Large earrings and long hair.

I wish I could be nobody.
Wish I could hide my true self under the pain,
Take a knife to my body,
Rearrange it
just to my liking,

My bleeding, between thick legs.
No person can come from
someone so broken,
so diseased,
and hope it will disappear -
allowing the suffering to end.

I am not a woman, I am not
a man.
Not to be looked at as a gender,
but as a person.
A collective of my
experiences, hiding anger
through my words.

I want to be carried
out to sea,
let my body turn to foam
or let it grow moss - giving way,
to new life.
Back to the Earth it goes.

Discard it
in the dumpster of a gas station,
let someone else use it,
appreciate it as it deserves.
More than I ever can.

Or, maybe,
it will return to God soon.
I will be free.
Free of this body,
joining my mind
into the world that took it.

Finnialla Wright

Blood Red Consequences

Clawing hands scrape up my insides.
Feeling a man that
will never be able to satisfy
the lingering emptiness of motherhood.
The parent trap that befalls
anyone with a uterus.
The Bodily Autonomy Myths.

Sexualized by eleven,
for the curse of big breasts
large hips for the child
I'll kill myself giving birth to

In the process. No
options to throw it out for
sanity's sake, power of attorney
is no more than
an imaginary man never coming for me
but coming in me.
They demand full-term consequences
for a part-time mistake.

Taking away the power.
My mother found out the lump
wasn't a little brother,
but cancer. Still,
chastised outside of Planned
Parenthood all the same,
dying at nineteen for
someone else's definition of life.

A lifesaving right
to birth control,
used to counteract a disease
given to me like a bad
hand-me-down
you'd throw in the back of your closet.
The shame to bleed out in a bathtub,
just like the women who
came before, fighting for health and
denied the right to live.

Let them choke on their words,
Hands dyed red from the blood,
spilled on their
actions.

Finnialla Wright

Let's face it —

you're special!

Vanessa tells *MT* she'd like to see her character have fun super powers in the *HSM* sequel!

Quiz: How **fun** are you?

START

Your BFF is crying her eyes out over a mean boy. You hate to see her in so much pain! You:

Bring over a pint of B&J and prepare to listen.

You've got tix to see Kelly Clarkson in concert! You can't wait to:

Dance as if you're the one on stage!

Your little bro has a huge obsession with hippos and can't wait to go to the zoo. You:

Take her rollerblading to get her mind off him.

Would rather buy him a book on hippos.

Sing along with her.

Go to the zoo. Why not?

Your 'rents are taking the fam to Six Flags! You can't wait to:

Dare.

You're at a pal's sleepover, and it's Truth or Dare time! You choose:

Eat cotton candy.

Truth.

You've been at the pool all day! You passed the time by:

Reading a copy of *MT*.

Ride the roller coasters!

A night in with the girls.

Doing cannon-baths.

Your idea of the best end-of-summer blowout would be:

A huge party!

FUN level: Off the charts

No wonder you have so many friends — you're totally F.U.N.: Fabulously Unique and Never bored. Always the party girl, life's never drab when you're around!

FUN level: On the rise

Depending on your mood, you could hit a rapin' rock concert or a tearjerker with buds. Your motto: Life's too short not to have an open mind!

FUN level: Super-chill

A quiet night in can be just as rockin' as a big party — it all depends on the company! If you're havin' a good time, why pressure yourself to be Ms. Wild?

I Dreamt a Child is a Gift, not a Gender Reveal

Rachel Orta

Supermarket fruits, arranged in an array of sizes, tastes. Today a new distinction - pineapple bins separated across the aisle. A young woman pushing her cart towards the produce, stopped by many exclaiming: *you need a pineapple, the clock is ticking!* The woman had been busy thinking of other sweets, but now, here she runs to the pineapple crates. On one side of the aisle a crate coated in blue with matching ribbons adorning each fruit. The other side had a similar sight, a pink-painted crate with matching ribbons decorating each fruit. Patrons ran up to the young woman one after another, offering advice, offering assurance in choice, reminding her of the time - fruit does not stay well for long. One man stated she must pick blue, its taste would be bold and strong. An elderly lady agreed, pink would be far too sweet, spikier, and harder to break into pieces. A bit confused on the push for fruit, she reached for one from the middle. A pineapple ripe, dropped in the aisle, could it be pink or could it be blue? Once home, on the counter she sliced off the pineapple's crown, beneath was golden hair atop a second, softer crown. The head of a child, cuddled up in the core, the woman gently cut away the spiky skin, then the juicy flesh. Pulling away the last of the pineapple, the woman now held onto the baby. Peering in the child's eyes, the woman said these words: *you can be whatever you would like, sweet or bold or whomever, as for blue or pink we won't bother; I will love you forever.*

Breaking Waters

Rachel Canwell

They drive home from the hospital, through the tourists, along the prom. The baby snuffles asleep in the seat behind her. Alien, fragile, achingly new.

But all the while, Lydia is craning her neck, desperate to catch even a glimpse of the sea. She shifts, turns her head, flinching slightly at the pull of stitches, tongue snaking out at the corner of her mouth cupping the salt from her skin - unconsciously harvesting tears and sweat.

Aidan reaches over, fighting to keep his eyes on the road, his hand tight upon her knee. Misinterpreting her restlessness he whispers, *"It's ok. He's still asleep; not long and we will be home."*

She stares at him bemused and then looks away.

But it's too late. The sea is gone.

✱✱

Back home, and as soon as she can, Lydia takes what she needs from the kitchen cupboard and locks herself away.

And runs a bath.

She adds no oil or foam. It's not her usual kind of bath, nothing like the sort she used to take.

Before.

No candles, no soft music or slightly damp book. No hour long soaks, or wrinkled toes.

She wrenches the taps open and then thrusts her hands into the flow; catching the rush and seeking the clean.

She fills the tub, as high as she dare, watching the surface rock gently, then settle. Reflections and refractions, glimmering gold, silver and inexplicably green.

She adds handfuls of salt. Watching it settle, watching it sink and dissolve.

Then she lowers herself. Slowly, wincing. Piece by piece, part by aching, stinging part. Feet, thighs. Water rising, lapping at her rawness. She holds her breath.

Pauses for the pain.

Snatching air, she sinks this unfamiliar stomach, followed by someone else's full and tender breasts...

Then shoulders, neck...

Finally head, slipping gently, gliding, beneath the surface. Water caresses her cheek and, startled, she forgets to breathe.

There she lies.

With hair streaming, waving around her like long, golden weeds.

And she opens her eyes. Forcing them wide, staring up through the shivering haze. Watching the spotlights in the ceiling morph into stars. Turning into suns; white hot, wavering, drifting far away.

In her mind she counts. Counts the seconds until her lungs burn. And her heart is full and alive with the simple choice of salt water.

Then comes his cry.

Even beneath the surface it reaches her. Thin, insistent and high.

Untethered and raw.

And deep inside her something snaps and something joins.

Her spine bends, neck arcs. Pushing up, she breaks the surface.

Bursting back towards the light.



Farts and Other Pleasurable Hassles *Liz Darrell*

on the nightly news

Addissyn House

they found another body. another woman's body. they don't even say *body* any more. as if *body* is too grotesque, too ethereal for the news. i took an entire class on femicide in latin america my freshman year of college. on the *remains* of women killed because they dared to look somewhere else, to demand something else. i've seen the shoes used to represent loss of life. lost in the desert, left in the woods, found in a dumpster. i remember the faces. the nameless women. i know i could be one. i know i could be next. i am searching for something else. they might find me.

i walk with keys in my pocket. i watch the faces around me. scrutinizing. i think, as i walk, that if someone tries to stop me, i know which way to run. i've been followed before. my heart quickens because men forget what they look like to a woman by herself. i see the danger on the nightly news. another (some)*body*. i have everyone i know on speed dial. i aimlessly practice the emergency features on my phone. i say hi to everyone i pass on the street in case i need to scream for help. then they'll know my voice. i'm ready. in case i'm the next body. i: the *remains*.

some say she doth ____ too much :: on forms (and performances) of speech

Jen Schneider

in june 2022, on the heels of injustice & feet (bare & bruised) from the supreme court, women held signs with scripts of rights & fights – *my body, my rights / abort the court / we're not ovary-acting* – over tanks. words of weariness (unchanged) and war (for change) brushed shoulders with humidity and visibility. a media blitz / tempers on the fritz. police along perimeters. all corners crafted. all orders drafted. *marcha*. rubber soles kissed asphalt. cries of *marcha* kissed lips. in past, present, & future tense. of grammar and gripes both (im) proper & (ir)regular. “*the lady doth protest too much, me thinks*” wrote shakespeare. blends of nouns, verbs, & adjectives. *hamlet* performed on stages / in texts / along gravel roads. *marcha*. through histories both hot & haunting. from the 1789 march on Versailles to the suffrage parade of 1913. handwritten signs with scripts of rights & fights – *mr. president / how long must women wait for liberty* – alongside tanks. strikes for equality in 1970 (*equal positions with equal pay*) and marches for peace in 1976. *marcha*. of inauguration protests (*judge women as people not as wives*) and pro-choice marches (*my mind, my body, my freedom*). of events large (the women’s march in 2017) and small – daily duos of time & space. crowds chant – *marcha*. rubber soles kiss asphalt. language lingers in layers. lyrics and loops of longing (& belonging). she speaks truths. *vérité*.

protest & march bear similarities across language. etymologies & roots blend. truths vary.

istina. pravda. sandhed. waarheid. vero. tõe. totuus. vérité.

at the foot of a future baked (staked & flaked) of fear, i type *vérité* into a cell. autocorrect converts my attempt at truth to bernie. not quite. next bertie. no. finally birth. tech, time, and twisted testimonies play cruel tricks. of nouns, verbs, & adjectives. time ticks. cells both technological and molecular work assumptions on lands no longer (of the) free. three backspace erasures (& even more judicial back steps) to move one step forward. (re)write *vérité*.

in july 2022, americans gather to celebrate the birth of a nation / darkness again shades gingham blankets. skies lit of storm clouds rain nouns, verbs, & adjectives of unfathomable propositions. patriotism a pale shadow. no longer a form of speech. “*the lady doth protest too much, me thinks*” wrote shakespeare. *hamlet* performed on stages / in texts / along gravel roads. cherry pie bleeds on soles & souls. *marcha* yells a woman after telling her mother she loves her. one last time. *marcha* yells a mother after grabbing the arm of an orphaned child. alone. parades of protests & individual truths. handwritten signs with scripts of rights & fights.

vérité –
real patriots / keep cool
a kiss
 – *is not a contract*
to ask freedom / for women
is not a crime
 – *can makeup cover*
the wounds / of our oppression
/ don't cry
 – *resist / marcha*

timelines both chronological
 & cryptic collude. attire changes
 – corsets unlaced / attitudes
 persist – whalebones both
 flexible & strong maneuver.
 / those that conspire
 shall not tire / a woman's
 place / remains in the resistance
 / justice (on parade) cannot wait.
 all reigns trained. targets
 in plain sight / of gender
 roles & rubber soles.
 – amidst atmospheric souls.
 planets revolve around a singular
 sun / of fire & fuel / most all
 moons in the solar system / point
 faces (& fingers) at planets
 bare / both moons & sun
 of potions & patterns – parades
 / alignments of prepositions
 & propositions / truths – *vérité*

to Pa · rade
 /pəˈrād/
 to March
 /märCH/

to Protest
 /'prōˌtest/

in/of/on
 streets
 each cell a truth
 in/of/on
protest. parade.

marcha. vérité.
 each cell a form

of speech
 adjectives
 verbs
 nouns

of past
 & future tenses

one of the trillions
 nerves
 muscles
 connective tissue

tightly attached.
 in/of/on
 communication hubs.
 in bold / oversized font
 of wrapped text
 & liquid ink
 quick dry / quick wit
 truths rain (to reign).

vérité

12 (plus) reasons to march (in protest)

1. Past and future tenses predict more than pretenses.
2. Time marches. Attitudes persist. Both twist.
3. Walls are made by more than muscles. Muscles connect more than tissue.
4. Communication bubbles when (em)broiled.
5. Truths are individually verified (& verifiable).
6. Nouns, verbs, and adjectives blend (& brush) shoulders.
7. Displays of emotion cross boundaries (& forms of speech).
8. Public processions promote ponderings (& sometimes concessions).
9. Prepositions often form propositions.
10. Public squares are rarely formed of equal sides.
11. March and charm share the same letters. Syllables strung in air float.
12. Women possess (more than) charm & lead (more than) marches.
13. *Some say she doth ___ too much.*

